

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04
NSAE-00 SIL-01 CU-02 AID-05 OMB-01 PC-01 TRSE-00
DHA-02 SCA-01 OC-06 CCO-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 L-03
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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 10494

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: CG, ELAB
SUBJECT: LABOR UNREST IN KINSHASA
REF: KINSHASA A-152

1. THE CHRISTMAS SEASON HAS COME AGAIN TO KINSHASA, DESPITE ITS FORMAL ABOLITION BY THE GOZ IN THE NAME OF AUTHENTICITY, BRINGING WITH IT A RESURGENCE OF LABOR UNREST PROVOKED IN PART BY GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO BAR YEAR-END "13TH-MONTH" BONUSES. WORKERS, CAUGHT BETWEEN FAMILY PRESSURES FOR HOLIDAY SPENDING AND THE RAPID DECLINE IN THEIR PURCHASING POWER IN RECENT MONTHS (REFAIR), ARE DEMANDING AT LEAST THE BONUSES. THE GOZ HAS COUNTERED BY STRESSING THE NEED FOR AUSTERITY IN ORDER TO IMPLEMENT THE STABILIZATION PROGRAM, THUS FAR WITH LITTLE SUCCESS.

2. LABOR STRIFE HAS BEEN GREATEST IN THE TRANSPORTATION SECTOR, PARTICULARLY AT AIR ZAIRE AND ONATRA. WORKERS AT AIR ZAIRE WENT OUT ON STRIKE BRIEFLY LAST WEEK IN PROTEST OVER BOTH THE GOVERNMENT'S REFUSAL TO GRANT THE BONUSES AND A RECENT RECLASSIFICATION OF POSITIONS WHICH THREATENED TO REDUCE THE SALARIES OF MANY EMPLOYEES. THE WORKERS RETURNED TO THEIR JOBS FOLLOWING A MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT TO SUSPEND SALARY CUTS PENDING REVIEW, BUT THEY THREATENED TO RENEW THEIR STRIKE IF AIR ZAIRE
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DID NOT CONCEDE ON THE ISSUE OF BONUSES BY DECEMBER 15. ACCORDING TO MANAGEMENT, AIR ZAIRE WAS WILLING TO PAY THE BONUSES BUT WAS PREVENTED FROM DOING SO BY THE GOZ. LITTLE HELP COULD BE EXPECTED FROM UNTZA: THE UNION OFFICIAL WHO MET WITH THE WORKERS LAST FRIDAY WAS CONVINCED THAT HE WOULD BE PHYSICALLY ATTACKED BY THEM IF HE TRIED AGAIN TO DEFEND THE GOVERNMENT'S

POSITION.

3. ONATRA WORKERS LAST WEEK ATTEMPTED TO STONE THEIR FIRM'S DIRECTOR AND THEN STRUCK TO PROTEST THE POSSIBILITY OF MASSIVE LAYOFFS AS WELL AS THE GOVERNMENT'S STAND ON BONUSES. ACCORDING TO A UNTZA SOURCE, THE WORKERS WERE TEMPORARILY PLACATED BY THE DIRECTOR'S PROMISE TO PAY THE BONUSES, BUT THE COMMISSIONER OF TRANSPORTATION OVERRULED HIM. WITH ONATRA ABOUT TO EXPLODE AND THE AIR ZAIRE WORKERS BACK OUT ON STRIKE, THE GOZ REPORTEDLY AGREED ON DEC. 15 TO GRANT THE BONUSES.

4. ALTHOUGH THE GOZ WILL TRY TO LIMIT ITS CONCESSION TO THE TRANSPORTATION SECTOR, SCATTERED REPORTS OF STRIKES AT OTHER FIRMS (INCLUDING SGA AND THE NATIONAL SUGAR OFFICE) AND THE PRECEDENT SET LAST YEAR, WHEN STRIKING WORKERS FORCED THE REVERSAL OF THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO SUSPEND THE YEAR-END PAYMENTS, SUGGEST THAT THE MOBUTU REGIME MAY BE FORCED TO BEAT A GENERAL RETREAT ON THIS ISSUE.

5. PREVIOUS ROUNDS OF LABOR UNREST HAVE REVEALED A WEAKNESS OF THE MOBUTU REGIME: HANDICAPPED IN ITS ABILITY TO PREACH AUSTERITY CONVINCINGLY BY ITS PENCHANT FOR CONSPICUOUS ELITE CONSUMPTION AND PRESTIGE PROJECTS, IT HAS GREAT DIFFICULTY IN WORKING THE MIDDLE GROUND BETWEEN CAPITULATION AND COERCION IN RESPONDING TO LABOR'S DEMANDS. IN HIS KINKOLE SPEECH LAST JUNE, MOBUTU REITERATED HIS OPPOSITION TO STRIKES AND APPEALED TO WORKERS TO AVAIL THEMSELVES OF INSTITUTIONAL CHANNELS, LEADING ULTIMATELY TO HIM, IN SEEKING REFRESS OF GRIEVANCES. AS THE FREQUENCY OF STRIKES AND DEMONSTRATIONS SUBSEQUENTLY INCREASED, MOBUTU COMBINED ATTEMPTS AT PERSUASION WITH PARTIAL

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ACCEPTANCE OF WORKERS' DEMANDS IN AN ATTEMPT TO REDUCE TENSIONS, BUT SUCCEEDED ONLY IN ENCOURAGING GREATER INTRANSIGENCE. MOBUTU EVENTUALLY ABANDONED ATTEMPTS AT CONCILIATION AND DISPATCHED TROOPS UNDER GENERAL BUMBA TO QUELL DISSIDENT WORKERS IN SHABA. COWED IN SUBMISSION, LABOR HAS REMAINED REMARKABLY QUIET UNTIL NOW. WHAT REMAINS TO BE SEEN IS WHETHER REGIME CONCESSIONS ON BONUSES WILL ENCOURAGE WORKERS TO ESCALATE THEIR DEMANDS UNTIL THEY CONVINCE MOBUTU THAT THE ECONOMIC RISK TO A FURTHER UNDERMINING OF THE STABILIZATION PROGRAM OUTWEIGHS THE POLITICAL RISK INHERENT IN ANOTHER COERCIVE RESPONSE.

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